

Theology vol 122.

A N
ANSWER
TO A
LETTER
TO

Samuel Holden, Esq;

Occasion'd by his Speech deliver-
ed from the *Chair*, at a Gene-
ral Assembly of the *Dissenters*,
on the 29th of *November*,
1732.

L O N D O N :

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A N
A N S W E R
TO A
L E T T E R
TO
Samuel Holden, Esq; &c.

S I R,

A F T E R due
Acknowledgment
for the Civility
wherewith you
treat me, which
(though every
Man's Right) ought not to be
passed over without Thanks, in
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Times when it is so little praised ; the Speech you refer to I own, though it was not printed by my *Direction*.

I am obliged for your kind Opinion of it ; and know no more suitable Returns, than to endeavour to set you right where I think you mistake me, and, I hope not designedly, misrepresent the Dissenters.

You are pleased to look on me as at the *Head of a Party*, acting only with a View to the particular Interest of that Party, (which I utterly disclaim;) and the Dissenters, as *attacking the Established Church* ; which is, I hope, as far from their Thoughts, as a Concurrence with

with them therein is from mine.

In this View, you say I have acted *in Character*, though not *with Caution*; the giving Advice being more prudent *within Doors*, and *among Friends*; but the making it thus *publick* was a wrong Step. I readily concur with you herein, (was the Case as you suppose it) as also in the *unpolitick* (and I will add *unchristian*) Part the Dissenters have acted in some of the Disputes referred to. This being allowed, methinks there is the least Reason for the terrible Apprehensions you have of their undermining the Church, and disturbing the State, *who can agree in no-*
 B 2 *thing*;

thing ; and, if this be true, are rather the Objects of Pity and Contempt, than of Fears and Jealousies. Sure in him who believes the one, the Concerns of the other must at least be ill grounded. Such Infinitions seem to bespeak at the next Election the Cry of the *Church*, and the *Dissenters* ; which whoever promotes, either on one Side or the other, is, I fear, no Friend either to Church or State ; and has small Pretensions to the Description you a little after give of a good Subject ; and look as if they were intended to alarm his Majesty, his Parliament, and his Ministers, with the Cry of the Church, should they in their great Wisdom give any
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Attention to the Dissenters, who only humbly pray to be restored to their Birthright ; which Birthright they waved to purchase the Safety of this Establishment (which you suppose them attacking) and this too at a Time when in imminent Danger ; which the then Parliament was so sensible of, that a Bill for the Relief of the Protestant Dissenters was brought in, and passed both Houses, but practised away when it should have had the Royal Assent : The only Instance, I believe, of this Nature that our History furnishes us with.

Was it the Dissenters who raised the Cry of the *Church*
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in Dr. *Sacheverell's* Time, to the Loss of those Advantages we had a reasonable Prospect of from the numerous Victories God had blessed us with ; and, what was of infinitely greater Consequence, the imminent Danger and Hazard of the Protestant Succession. This I mention, not to irritate or offend any ; but, as far as may be, to prevent the same Game being played over again, to the Dishonour of his Majesty, and the Risque of the Protestant Religion, and endangering the Liberties of *Englishmen*.

Your *Freedom*, Sir, needs no *Forgiveness*, but has my Thanks ; since an Opportunity is thereby given me to set the
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Dissenters and myself (I hope) right in your Opinion, and that of the Publick. And this brings me to consider what I am sorry has given you Offence, and occasioned you this Trouble.

In answering your Question, What could tempt me to use those Expressions, that the *Design of repealing the Corporation and Test Acts can be opposed by none, but such as are under the Power of Bigotry, or Biass of Interest?* I hope it will appear I have not acted out of Character, nor with any Impropriety. I allow your Definition of *Bigotry*, except its necessarily including *Unkindness* and *Severity*. But yet even then they stand
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convicted of the Character, in my humble Opinion, who endeavour to keep the Dissenters under the present Restraints, and withhold from them a Right, belonging to every Protestant Subject.

It is every Man's Business that lives in this World, to have a Regard to the Rights of Society; and every one who believes another World, to be thoughtful of that. What I had therefore in View was the Rights of *Englishmen*, and the Honour of Religion; in Comparison of which, the Interest of any particular Sect or Party, are mean and contemptible; a Principle, which I am neither acted by on this, and, I hope, shall never

ver be on any other Occasion:
 And sure it is needless to go
 about to prove the Acts in Que-
 stion are an Abridgement of the
 One, and (though not designed)
 have eventually proved an hor-
 rid Profanation of the Other;
 and have, withal, given but too
 much Advantage to those who
 are, perhaps, of no Religion, to
 insinuate against such as obsti-
 nately contend for them, as
 tho' they believed there was lit-
 tle real in Christianity, save the
 Honours and Emoluments it
 brings in Civil Life. This sure is
 Matter of Offence; on whom it
 lies to remove it, becomes not
 me to say.

I meddle not with Persons or
 Parties, save in general those of
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any Party who are for infringing the Liberties of Mankind, and doing Dishonour to Religion; in this View I used the Word *Bigotry*, and in this Sense I hope you will allow it justifiable. I must add, I verily believe the Church of *England* (to which it is well known I am far from having any Averfion) stands in no need of such a *Barrier*, nor could be in the least endangered by the Removal. But could any Establishment need to be supported at the Expence of the Honour of God in the Prostitution of the most Solemn Right of our Holy Religion, and an Infringement on the Liberties of Mankind, I leave it to every confiderate Reader to determine which ought to give Way.

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If any few among the Dissenters could be so wild as to entertain the least Thought of what you insinuate, they must not only expose themselves to the Repentment of the Church, but to the Contempt of the rest of their Body; and this being the Case, what just Ground of Alarm can then be given, by desiring the Removal of what affects every *Englishman* as well as themselves?

These, I hope and believe, are their principal Views; I am sure they are mine; tho' you are pleased to say, the Imputation of *Interest* comes from those, who in the Pursuit of this whole *Affair can have nothing in View but Temporal Interest*. I assure
C 2 you,

you, Sir, these Acts of Parliament are no Bars to me, had I either Pretensions to, or Merits for a Place, to neither of which do I lay any Claim; and whoever knows the State of the Dissenters, will be far from thinking that many of them are likely to be vested with Places of high Power and Influence.

I desire, Sir, to pay all due Regard and Deference to the present Establishment, be it as ancient as you say, or more modern; but I must own my superior Regards to the express Declaration of the Holy Founder of our Religion, who has said *his Kingdom is not of this World.* Now, are the Things which you (not I) bring in Question,

tion, of this World, or not?
 And yet 'tis not to be denied that many Ecclesiasticks have fallen into Sentiments contrary to this exprefs Declaration. Hence the Decay of Religion; hence the deplorable State of the Christian World at present and in former Times; hence the first Division of the Church of *England* into Churchmen and Dissenters; hence the Distraction of those Times you are pleased to recal to Mind, and of which you seem to apprehend the Return; and were our Circumstances the same, I allow these Apprehensions would be just. But have we now any Star-Chamber or High Commission Courts for the Ecclesiasticks to exercise their Passions by, on those who differ from

from them? And whoever is acquainted with their History and Behaviour from Queen *Elizabeth* to King *Charles* the First's Time, will cease to wonder at the Distractions that broke out in his Reign, but rather that they came on no sooner. By these Means was the Nation gradually prepared for that sad Scene of Confusion and Misery; and till the same, or the like Circumstances and Conjunctions occur, (which God avert) the Fears you put your self or others into, are a meer *Panick*, and cannot in the Nature of Things arise, unless, for the sake of continuing Restraints, an Effect must be supposed without a Cause.

I find an Apostolick Injunction, to *fear God, and honour the King*; but neither in the *Gospels* or *Epistles* any Precept or Exhortation to the People, to enter into the Passions, and espouse the Quarrels of the Clergy, of any Denomination whatsoever; though I must own this Practice has great Antiquity on its Side.

I assure you, Sir, I sincerely desire, and shall to the utmost of my Power endeavour, to deserve the Character of a good *Subject* in the Manner you describe him, by being a Lover of Peace and Quietness, and delighting to see the Administration of his Prince easy and unimbarraffed; and could I see
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there was any necessary and unavoidable Connexion between the Repeal or Explanation of the Acts in Question (so far as they affect Protestant Dissenters) and Disturbances in Church or State, (the contrary of which is, I hope, evident) I would immediately renounce all further Pursuits; and cannot but think the far greatest Part of the Dissenters are of this Opinion, as is apparent from their past Conduct: But is it reasonable that, because some will entertain groundless and unnatural Jealousies, others should, at a proper Time, lay aside all peaceable and modest Attempts for what they (after the most impartial Inquiry and Consideration) apprehend would greatly

ly tend to the Honour of Religion, the Publick Good, and the Security of his Majesty's Person and Government, under which we enjoy as great and valuable Blessings as any former Time can shew.

I shall endeavour to profit by your kind Advice, should I have any further Occasion to deliver my Thoughts in publick on the Subject before us; and hope to keep within the Bounds of Truth and Decency. The Cause needs no Lye to support it, nor can be advantaged by it: If it did, I abhor the Maxim of doing Evil, that Good may come of it; and would be far from practising it; but will ever strive to keep in View

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the Honour of Religion, the Publick Peace, the Welfare of the Nation, the Ease of his Majesty's Administration, and, in Subordination to these, the Interest and Rights of Protestant Dissenters ; avoiding, if possible, the giving Offence to any Person whatsoever ; especially to a Gentleman (though unknown) whose Treatment bespeaks my Regard, notwithstanding any Difference in our Opinions.

I am,

S I R,

*Your most humble and
obdient Servant,*

S. H.

